

Media Literacy in Indian Vedic Literature

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Abstract

Media Literacy is a required literacy for understanding communication and the text in a given environment. Communication has co-existed with society and humanity. From the very beginning of communication in pictographic form, a common understanding and experiences were required for the interpretation of the message. In the contemporary world, when communication is deliberate and sustained with greater impacts on human life with the help of technology, the literacy of the media and its uses are very much required. Different schools of thought have analysed and dissected varying methods to give media literacy to their citizenry to combat the challenges. The aim of this paper is to delve into ethical and legal considerations of different communication models. The fundamental purpose of Vedic Education System in ancient India was to develop morality and ethics. This paper is a commentary on the Media Literacy components of Vedic Literature.

Keywords: *Media Literacy, Communication, Vedic Literature, Morality, Ethics*

Introduction

The role and influence of media and communication in our day-to-day life is enormous. Its uses and effects cannot be ignored in our contemporary media culture. This is reflected in various walks of life in some form or another (Cheung & Dubey, 2012). To meet the challenges that arise due to influences on culture, communication, understanding and the values it is important to understand the meaning of the text and the message. Several scholars have

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suggested media literacy among citizenries be incorporated and developed to comprehend, analyze and understand the message and its meaning (Abu-fadil, 2007; Dotzler, 2012; Mason, 2016; Worsnop, 2004) . The requirement to incorporate media literacy in school curricula was also advocated by various institutions and organizations along with different scholars (Bazalgette, 2010; Chandana, 2022; Kačínová et al., 2014; Marín et al., 2015; Vrabec et al., 2013). Indian Vedic Literature was a source of education for a very long period keeping in mind the requirements of the culture and communication in Indian society. The Indian education system still focuses on the values and the motives of education based on the morals inferred from the communication process of the past. This paper is an analytical analysis of Indian Vedic Literature towards media literacy of the disciples and the citizenry, and how values and skills can fulfill the contemporary requisites of media literacy in contemporary media environments.

It is accepted that the interrelation of the functional skills of the media and cultural factors constructs media literacy. This is the key to identifying, evaluating and critically appreciating a text for acceptance and perception. Media literacy also gives an idea of the content creation process (Silverblatt et al., 2022) which will enable the media literate individual about the process and procedural lacunas of media and the construction of the messages. Media literacy will orient the learners' perception to judge the content, and the meaning based on its requisites and uses. The ability to critically evaluate the content, text and message is required to understand the meaning in a given socio-cultural environment (Silverblatt et al., 2022). Contemporary media penetration, accesses and the consumption behavior affects the flow of information. In the Indian scenario, media is capturing the common space of life at a great pace.

Indian Media Scenario

Mass media is capable of producing harmful effects on individuals and society (Potter, 2013). Indian Mass Media scenario is quite different from other countries. Indian multicultural society is a cluster of multi-linguistic societies as well. That is why, the Indian Media is diversified in its socio-cultural nature and treatment. The multicultural and multi-linguistic nature of Indian society provides an opportunity for heterogeneous media access to the citizenry. This heterogeneous nature of the Media and Entertainment Industry is not only

a multi-faceted communication provider but also acts as a huge segment of business. With various shades of communication and dependencies of business (Table 1), media adopts various techniques of spreading information to the society.

Table 1
Media and Entertainment Industry in India

SN	Media	Consumers	G r o w t h rate		Remarks
1	Broadband Subscribers	876.53 Million			Top five broadband service providers have more than 98 % of the subscribers. Wireless broadband had a higher growth rate in rural areas.
2.	Total Telephone	1179.21 Million (30.78 Million Wire line included)			Urban Tele- density 133.55% Rural Tele- density 57.97% (TRAI- Nov-2023)
3.	Mobile Users	1148.43 Million			India spends 82% time on mobile phone apps for media and entertainment.
4.	Print Media	Total RNI registered 146045 With 391712282 Daily circulation (annual statement 2021-23)			As per the Annual Statement 2021-2022 issued Print Media can manage a growth rate of 1.05% from the previous year (Press in India 2021-22, 2023).
5.	Television	210 Million (BARC, 2022)			India's Broadcasting and cable TV market is 13.61 Billion Dollars (TechSci Research, 2023).

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6	Radio	92% of the Area and reach up to 99.19 % of the population with the help of 262 Radio stations (Prasar Bharti). Total 388 private FM radio stations. (Indian Express, February 1, 2023) As per the List of Commissioned Community Radio Stations Having Valid GOPA as of 01.12.2023 of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting there are a total 460 operational Community Radio Stations in India.	
7.	Internet	The digital media segment in India is growing with a 30% growth rate and will achieve a 6.9 Billion dollar figure in 2022 (Jain, 2023). Online gaming reached at a figure of 1.6 Billion dollars in 2022. (Jain, 2023) The share of regional content in TV and OTT is about 50%. (Jain, 2023) The Digital advertising industry – 6.1 Billion Dollars. (Jain, 2023)	
8.	others	This is also interesting that the animation and VFX industry in India is growing by 29% with a current market value of 1.3 billion dollars (Jain, 2023).	
9.	Films	1600+ films per year	The Industry reached to 1.2 Billion dollar theatrical collection (Jain, 2023).

The varied content for heterogeneous audiences is available on all the platforms, irrespective of their psychographic deviations and requisites.

Media Literacy and the Indian Vedic Text

Media literacy comprises the skill set required to create, understand, and interpret the meaning of the text supplied by the media at various stages. These skills will provide enhanced understanding of communication and the text of communication but also will regulate its consumption and influence in daily life. According to Vedic understanding, as pointed out by Adhikary (2014), communication is a phenomenon of transmitting knowledge, information and

the idea to another person involved in the process. This may be indigenous or varied in terms of their nature. Vedic and post-Vedic schools of thought were very clear about the literacy of the communication process. The concepts of 'Sahridayata', 'Rasaswadana' and 'Sadharnikaran' were under the influence of understanding the communication process.

Communication was defined by various researchers and institutions later, but the phenomenon's existence has existed since the existence of humans and society. Available literature may define the process in its understanding, but nobody can ignore the influences and effects of societal concepts on the communication process. Even in the process of early communication "*Shruti*" was the acceptable mode of communication. Vedic literature was communicated in the same format and considered a source of knowledge. In the Vedic system of communication, society was at the top of the priority list of communication.

The Western philosophers also believed that Culture and communication are inseparable, and mass communication, as we've seen, is a particularly powerful, pervasive, and complex form of communication (Stanley, 2017). Culture is created by communication, and it affects cultural practices. So, it is important to understand the communication process to deal with its influences on society and individuals. Media literacy may be defined as a critical understanding of media texts and the creative ability to produce them (Duran & James, 2007). This skill will provide an opportunity to understand the process of message design and its influences on life. In other words "communicative competence" (Burn & Durran, 2007) is the key to understanding media literacy. Carolyn Wilson (2019) argues that "all media is constructed, it constructs reality" (p. 6). The opinions and views of reality are based on the communication received, analysed and perceived. Receivers negotiate the meaning of the message based on the constructed reality of the individual, which is affected by several factors like commercial implications, business models, ideological factors, values, social and political implications, grammar and codified reality etc. (Pungente, 1987). Indian Vedic texts are also vocal about the same.

According to Yajnavalkya Smriti, there are fourteen sources of knowledge including Vedas, Vedangs and the Purana. There are four Vedas i.e. *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*, and six Vedangs ie. *Shikha*, *Kalpa*, *Vyakarna*, *Nirukta*, *Chanda* and *Jyotisha*, *Purana*, *Nyaya*, *Meemamsa* and

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Dharmshashtra (Tiwari, n.d.). The knowledge about the source and content is the basic requirement of Media Literacy. The Yajnavalkya Smriti states the source of knowledge for the common man. The *Samhita*, *Shikah* and *Meemamsa* are further extensions and clarifications about the grammar, narratives of the message and the meaning of the statements. The Vedic *Suktas* are *Mantras*, and *Meemamsa* are the observations and clarifications of the same for a common man (Tiwari, n.d.).

Formation of society is not a phenomenon of vacuum, the role of communication is always there to formulate a society of any nature, whether they have systematic communication channels or not, but the presence of communication is proven in the act itself. As God-fearing people, fear of nature gave birth to a lot of mystic communication about the almighty to the Indian society. The Indian communication system of “*Shruti parampara*” was derived from the two-way communication process and the ‘Guru’ was an important nucleus of the communication process with communication in dialogue form (Adhikary, 2014). The “*Guru Stotam*” was a known practice of the all-teaching learning centres in the Vedic study system.

*Gururbrahmaa Gururvishnur gururdevo Maheshwarah
Gururev Param Brahma Tasmai Shree Gurave Namah*

(Gurugita, 1:58)

‘Guru’ is the “*Brahma*” (The Creator), ‘Guru’ is the “*Vishnu*” (the Preserver), ‘Guru’ is “*Maheshwara*” (the Destroyer). ‘Guru’ is the absolute supreme power. I bow to that ‘Guru. (Bresnan, 2018) ‘Guru’ was given an equal importance to “*Parambrahma*”. One can understand the importance of ‘Guru’ as a communicator in Indian Vedic Education (Sengupta, 2020).

There was no dominance of the ‘Guru’ in the process of communication but the selection of ‘Guru’ was an important process and has been said that the selection of the ‘Guru’ should be judicious. In ‘*Shiksha Valli*’ of ‘*Taittiriya Upnishad*’ it is said that “*Yanyavadhani Karmani. Tani Sevityavani. No Itrani. Yanyasmakam Sucharitani. Tani Tavyopasyani. No Itrani (Taittiriya Upnishad Shikshavalli, 2024)*. This means a disciple should follow those virtuous actions only which are free from blemishes appreciable (*Taittiriya Upnishad Shikshavalli, 11:2*).

Thus the “Guru” himself suggests the judicious selection of the learnings. This is to create awareness about the impact of the message on individuals and society (Chinmayananda, 1962), a major component of media literacy, as defined by Art Silverblatt, Anubhuti Yadav and Vedabhyas Kundu in their book ‘Media Literacy Keys to Interpreting Media Messages’ published in 2022.

It is important to understand that Media Literacy is not limited to understanding the messages and the process of the channels, it is there to develop an understanding of the construction of the message from various angles, motivations for disseminating information and the selection of the content and selection of the terms to be communicated (Huguet et al., 2019). The ancient Indian text is full of such instructions in the process of communication. Normally the text starts in a dialogue form, like ‘Shrimad Bhagvatgita’ begins with ‘Dhritrashtra Uvach’

Dharmkshetre Kurukshetre samveta yuyutsavah

Maamkah pandvashchaiv kimura sanjay.

(Shrimadbhagvadgita, 1:1)

King Dhritrashtra is enquiring about the actions of his sons and the Pandavas gathered on the battlefield (Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2018). The very first Shloka of the text describes the power of information for a blind man and the power of dialogue in the process of communication.

The very popular Shloka is as follows:

satyam bruyat priyam bruyanna bruyat satyamapriyam

priyam ca nanrtam bruyadesa dharmah sanatanah

(Manusmritih 4:138)

the role of the communicator is defined by the oration of truth. He shall speak the truth only, the agreeable truth. The truth which is not agreeable should not be communicated. The agreeable untruth is also not to be communicated. This should be considered as the law of communication. The finding of the truth is the responsibility of the communicator between agreeable and truth. In case of any doubt, the communicator should develop the ability of such an individual who himself is not affected by the knowledge he has received from the various

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sources. Indian Vedic communication system advocates truth in all forms, its beauty and perfection (Krishnamurthy, 1999). In ‘*Shrimad Bhagvadgita*’ the qualities of the person who can understand the text of any communication is established through Shloka no. 53 of chapter two.

Shrutivipratipanna te yada sthasyati nishchala

Samadhavachla budhdhistda yogamvapsyasi

(Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2:53)

When your conscious is not disturbed by the figurative language of Vedas and you will adopt the meaning of the same in your “*Samadhi*” of self-realization then only you can achieve divine consciousness to deal with the issues (Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2018). The divine consciousness is nothing more than the interpretation of the meaning of the situation and the “*Aapad Dharma*.” The person who has achieved that divine consciousness will be considered as “*sthit pragaya*”. In the next shloka Arjuna says

Sthitipragasya ka bhasha samadhistasy keshav

Sthitidhih kim prabhashet kimasiit vrajet kim

(Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2:54)

This is the enquiry about the qualities of a “*sthit pragaya*” individual especially about how he speaks, what is the language and what the gesture and posture he follows. Further, the text describes the personality traits of the “*sthit pragaya*” individual in the form of a dialogue delivered by Shri Bhagwan. He describes the traits as if he is not influenced by any factors which may be regulated by senses only. He is not affected by feelings and emotions or materialistic sense objects and even willingness to achieve it. In short “a person who is not being affected by *Kam, Krodh, Lobha and Moha*” (Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2018). It does not mean that the Indian communication system is giving less importance to “*karma*.” “*Karma*” is important and the way one performs his duties is more important in achieving the desired goals than because the way a leader behaves is adopted by the common man so one should present morals and values in his act, which is to be followed by others. (Shrimadbhagvadgita, 2018)

*Yadydacharit shresthastdevetaro janah
Sa yatpramanam kurute lokastdanuvartate*

(Shrimadbhagvadgita, 3:21)

The act is defined as a message to the disciples the act should be by the values so that others can follow the same. The characteristics of the communicator, the message and the values imbibed in the message all are intact with the communicator.

Media literacy in Indian text is not limited to the process only, it is very much part of the behaviour of the communicator. That is why 'dharma' is defined accordingly in different roles and responsibilities. The knowledgeable individual is defined by his acts and behaviour. The role of the communicator is associated with responsibility and the social construct. The source of communication should be authentic and trustworthy. That is why the role of the guru is given the top priority in "shruti" and is also reinforced in various texts of Indian literature.

*Yah Kashitvkasychiddharmo Maluna Parikirtatah
Sah Sarvohbhihito Vede Sarvagyanmayo Hi Sah*

(Manusmritih, 2:7)

*Sarvam Tu Samvekshedyam Nikhilam Gyanchakshusha
Shruti Pramanyato Vidwan Swadharme Vivishet Vai.*

(Manusmritih, 2:8)

*Shrutismrityuditam Dharmanutishthan Hi Manavah
Ih Kirtipraptepti Pretya Chanuttamam Sukham*

(Manusmritih, 2:9)

The practices defined are the outcome of Vedas, the supreme treasure of knowledge. Disciples are advised to follow them after verification of their respective religious practices by their wisdom, references to Vedas and critical evaluation of the "dharma Shastra". Those who follow the practices prescribed in "The Vedas" and "Smritis" will achieve divine pleasure and fame in life (Dwivedi, 1917).

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The Indian text was not the text to be followed as it is, this gives an edge to the disciples and followers to adopt the path of critical evaluation, to find a correlation with their “Dharma Shastra” and the use of ‘judicious wisdom’ in the adaptation of the statements mentioned in the texts. That is what is required in the contemporary world to understand a text circulated in any media. Indian Vedic text is very particular about the message adaptation.

The role of the communicator and the receiver was also defined and perceived properly. The flow of knowledge was not defined by the linear methods only. This was associated with the receiver’s calibre, efforts, and willingness.

Dharmartho Yatir N Syatam Shushruta Vapi Tadwidha

Yatir Vidya N Vaktavya Shubham Bijmivoshre

(Manusmritih, 2:112)

Vidyayaiv Samam Kamam Martavyam Brahmavadina

Aapadyapi Hi Ghorayan N Twenmirine Vapet

(Manusmritih, 2:113)

The disciple who is not able to get Wealth, Knowledge, or “Dharma” (the meaning relies on moral practices) should not be taught. The seeds that are not sown properly are useless. This means after the teaching-learning process a disciple must receive some sort of influence on any walk of life like wisdom, practices, or the profession. Meaningful communication must have an impact on the life of the receiver. If it is not communicated effectively, knowledge should die along with the person who is spreading it. If the receiver is not able to utilise that information one should not communicate with. The role of the receiver was established along with the role of the communicator. Such a powerful acceptance of the importance of the communication process was established in the Indian texts. The communicator should not communicate the fact in a form that can affect the receiver’s emotions adversely. These media literacy components were very much part of the Indian teaching–learning process and were appreciated by society.

The Indian ancient folk tales were very particular about the ethics and the literacy of the perception. One of the folk tales of Panchtantra “*The Blind Men And The Elephant*” is a pure illustration of the perception and the perspective

(Kolb, 2017). The story is about the perspective of the communicator and the receiver both at the same time. The information remains the same but the perspective of accessing the information and presenting it to others may vary as per the perception of the beholder.

The principles of Vedic education in India were to inculcate values and social concerns in the disciples. To enrich the power of Voice, Vision and Audition they used to chant mantras like “*Vang Me Aasye Astu, NasorMen Pranoastu, Akshno Men Chakhcurastu*” which means my speech should be controlled and conscious, my nostrils should be filled with ‘*Pranvayu*’ and my eyes must have the vision (Khushalani, 2023). These are not only the symbol of the life but also a major components of communication where sender and receivers use these senses judiciously to complete the communication process. The Vedic Education was dedicated to developing “*Shradhdha*” “*Medha*” and “*Anumati*” along with other coefficients and outcomes of the knowledge. These characteristics were equal to understanding media literacy in the contemporary world. “*Shraddha*” was known to be the knowledge, theory and collection of facts with logic and experiences, “*Medha*” was an inspiration to originality and the “*Anumati*” is to understand, comprehend, and acceptance to the opinions of others (Khushalani, 2023). The reception of the messages was controlled by the “Bhadram Karnebhi, Shrudiyam devah”(Shuklayajurveda, 25:2:1) which means that whatever we hear should be auspicious, what so ever we see should be auspicious and adorable to the eyes (HYN Himalayan Yoga Academy, 2023). The division of “*Para*” and “*Apara*” was based on the knowledge of the physical world, spiritual knowledge and self-realization. For critical thinking, the Rishis suggested to follow “*Padartha*” in the “Nyaya” school of Indian Philosophy. They are systematic and appropriate steps for decision-making in any circumstance. A few of them were required to understand the communication phenomenon, like “*Pramana*”, the means of right knowledge is the key to understanding the information coming to the receiver. The “*Prameya*” is the object of right knowledge and the “*Samasya*” (doubt) and Prayojana (Motive) were taught for the questioning of the information and the motive behind the information circulated. If a disciple is developing the capability to doubt any information and find out the motive behind the communication, he will be able to critically appreciate not only the text but can verify the knowledge coming to affect the process (Mahesh Prabhu, 2019).

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The education in the Indian Vaidik System was

Tata karm yatir bandhay sa vidya ya vimuktaye
Aaya saya param karm vidyanya shilpa naipudyanam

(Shrivishnupuranam, 1:19:41)

This means the action should provide liberty and the knowledge should show the divine path, others are there to give you skills. The divine path is the inclusion of all the components of any knowledge where “Pramana,” “Prameya,” “Samasya” and “Prayojana” are clear and attainable. This skill is media literacy - the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication (Stanley, 2017). Although the literacy to comprehend and understand written words existed before the advent of the printing press around 5000 years ago (Stanley, 2017), but the literacy about the text and the message following the culture and the society is comprehended with the literacy (Silverblatt et al., 2022). The Indian Vedic literature was very particular about the communicator, the medium and the message. The perception and the influence of communication were also the core while communicating or planning to communicate. The role and characteristics of the Sender and the Receiver were pre-defined as per the requirement of media literacy.

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